

First 365 Days: Simon Bush on moving from industry advocate to technology insider

After more than two decades at the intersection of technology, industry and government, Simon Bush has stepped inside the sector he's long advised and represented. As Senior Director, Government Affairs and Public Policy, APAC at ServiceNow, he's used his deep policy expertise, industry network and commercial curiosity to help the business navigate AI, digital transformation and the evolving relationship between technology and government.

From industry advocate to technology insider

Simon's move to ServiceNow followed a career spent at the centre of Australia's technology ecosystem, leading both the Australian Home Entertainment Distributors Association (AHEDA) and more recently the The Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA).

Alongside running his own consulting business, his work representing sectors experiencing significant transformation gave him a unique vantage point. Through international delegations, government engagement programmes and years advising technology leaders, he had a close-up view of the organisations experiencing challenges and those defining the future of the industry. "I got to see which companies were succeeding, which were growing and where the market was heading," he reflects.

Simon also built an enviable network across technology and consulting companies, partner businesses, government officials and local and federal politicians. That network, combined with the credibility he had built over years of industry leadership, made him a natural fit for a senior government affairs role.

When considering his next move, he wanted to join an organisation that was growing, intellectually stimulating and helping customers solve meaningful problems. ServiceNow stood out as a company with a supportive "rowing in the same direction" culture, while also sitting at the centre of some of the most important conversations on digital transformation, workflow automation and AI.

For Simon, the emergence of generative and agentic AI made the opportunity even more compelling.

As he puts it, AI is not simply the topic of the year; it's likely to be one of the defining themes of the decade. Stepping into a company at the forefront of that transformation also meant immersing himself quickly in its technology, culture and ways of working. That made the quality of his onboarding particularly important.

The first 90 days: Learn, prioritise and connect

For senior reputation leaders stepping into new roles, effective onboarding can be the difference between spending months finding their footing and quickly building credibility and influence.

Yet Andrews Partnership's 2026 survey of Australia-based reputation leaders found that only 38% rated their most recent onboarding experience as excellent or good, while – surprisingly, considering the pivotal roles of these leaders – almost a third (29%) reported receiving no formal onboarding at all.



Simon's experience at ServiceNow provided a sharp contrast: Joining in August 2025, he received an extensive onboarding education, covering everything from cybersecurity and compliance to AI governance. Experiencing the company's workflow automation tools first-hand during onboarding also helped him gain the knowledge to articulate their value to customers and government.

Yet the most valuable lessons came from gaining clarity on what success looked like for APAC leadership. Shortly after joining, he attended a customer event where he had the opportunity to meet one-on-one with senior leaders from across the organisation.

His question was straightforward: "Where do you want me to spend my time?" With responsibility spanning the APAC region and no large team around him, prioritisation was critical and understanding where leadership saw the greatest opportunity allowed him to focus his efforts from the outset.

"My advice is to meet as soon as possible with business leadership, whether it's your geo or your region or both," he says. "That gave me a really clear direction and focus from day one, which in hindsight has been incredibly important in directing where I spend my effort."

This early direction proved vital and Simon also proactively networked and made connections across the business, a focus he says is still underway a year later. He also emphasises the importance of alignment in dual-reporting roles; connecting and aligning with your local commercial leader as well as a central functional leader.

Learning the business beyond the headlines

For anyone transitioning into a new organisation or industry, Simon stresses the importance of deeply learning the business before influencing it. "You've got to be a sponge. You understand government, you understand public policy, you understand impacts. What you don't necessarily know are the detailed technical terms and specific regulations that are relevant to the sector."

He adds that AI tools can make it significantly easier to get on top of issues and new information during both recruitment and onboarding: "There's probably never been a better time to learn about a new industry than now, given the capabilities that are at our fingertips."

For Simon, one of the biggest adjustments when moving in-house was building a thorough knowledge of ServiceNow's commercial engine. Going beyond surface-level information and asking in-depth questions can reap rewards, he says. "What products do we sell? How do we sell them? How do they all bundle together? What is the legacy customer base and where do we want to move to?"

That process uncovered insights which allowed him to understand where government affairs could contribute and provide a strategic perspective, rather than simply reacting to policy developments. Instead of viewing regulatory changes as isolated issues, he began assessing how broader government priorities aligned with the company's growth agenda.

The result was a shift from transactional engagement towards longer-term strategic thinking.

For Simon, this is where government affairs can create disproportionate value: identifying shifts in policy and public investment that may ultimately create new opportunities for customers, industry and the business itself.

He has cemented this close connection to the business's commercial agenda by working closely with sales teams and being part of their weekly meetings. He also supports and identifies large-scale deals that require a longer sales cycle and senior leadership or ministerial engagement, further demonstrating the integration of government affairs with the business's long-term growth priorities.

A front-row seat to the AI revolution

Simon's first year has coincided with one of the most consequential periods in AI policy.

From the impact of agentic AI on SaaS companies (dubbed the "SaaSocalypse") to debates around advanced AI model access and governance, few leaders have entered a role during a more transformative period.

Simon relishes the opportunity to be at the heart of the conversation and tackle the impacts: "For government affairs, what does that mean for sovereignty? What does that mean for responsible AI adoption? What are the impacts on the business?"

Over the past twelve months, discussions around AI have evolved at extraordinary speed and what began as experimentation has rapidly become a strategic priority across governments and enterprises alike. Governments recognise the potential to improve productivity, efficiency and citizen outcomes. At the same time, says Simon, they remain cautious about governance, accountability and risk.

This tension has made oversight and governance a central part of AI strategy. "We're having a lot of really good conversations around the need for what we call an AI control tower," he says, "which is starting by understanding where you might have AI across your business providing transparency before moving to how to govern and assess ROI."

Australia's AI governance framework is becoming increasingly rigorous. Commonwealth agencies are now required to maintain registers of AI use cases and publish AI transparency statements, with the [Digital Transformation Agency](#) providing oversight through a [central register of statements](#).

Simon believes governance is often misunderstood and rather than slowing adoption, he sees robust frameworks as an enabler of confidence and, as a result, innovation. When organisations know they have the right controls in place, they become more comfortable embracing AI at scale.

Five success principles for aspiring government affairs leaders

As Simon enters his second year, there are several policy challenges on the horizon.

Cybersecurity regulation, AI governance and emerging issues such as post-quantum cryptography (how to keep data secure even when powerful quantum computers become available) are all climbing rapidly up the agenda.

Yet despite the pace of change, his advice for leaders making similar transitions comes back to five principles:

- 1. Use thought leadership to build your reputation:** Simon believes reputation leaders should use their expertise and external perspective to build credibility long before they step into a new role. Understanding how government works, which policies matter and where technology is heading enables leaders to provide valuable insight. For Simon, this means continuing to share that perspective – whether through LinkedIn, internal notes or conversations – because thought leadership helps establish credibility and influence.
- 2. Shape the role before you start:** The opportunity to define a role often begins during the recruitment process. He advises using early conversations to clarify expectations, understand priorities and ensure the role is positioned to create value. For global organisations, this also means understanding how the role connects across different markets and teams, while ensuring the government affairs function remains relevant to customers and business growth.

3. Understand the business before trying to influence it:

Once in the role, spend time learning how the organisation really operates before seeking to shape its direction. Understanding how the business makes money, what drives customer value and where strategic priorities sit provides the foundation for effective influence. Reputation leaders are most effective when their advice is grounded in commercial reality.

4. Invest early in internal relationships:

While external stakeholder relationships are essential, Simon emphasises that internal relationships often determine whether a reputation leader can succeed. Building connections across functions, regions and leadership teams helps new leaders understand the organisation, identify opportunities and become trusted advisers.

5. Find quick wins that demonstrate value:

Finally, he highlights the importance of creating early momentum through visible impact. Finding opportunities that connect reputation activity to business outcomes helps build credibility quickly. Once stakeholders see the connection between the function and organisational priorities, trust and influence can compound over time.

For Simon, the future of the government affairs profession belongs to leaders who can do more than understand policy. It belongs to those who can translate policy into strategy, strategy into opportunity and, ultimately, opportunity into growth.

In a business environment where corporate affairs and government relations leaders are increasingly expected to demonstrate measurable value, his first 365 days demonstrate that influence is built by connecting external insight with commercial success from day one.